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Central Intelligence Agency



Washington, D.C. 20505

DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

25 September 1985

LIBYA: What if Qadhafi is Ousted?

Summary

Qadhafi's removal would result in an intense--and possibly bloody--power struggle among several competing factions. The most likely outcome would be a regime that curtailed Libya's worldwide support for revolutionary causes but remained opposed to many US policies in the Middle East and Africa. Its receptivity to developing a more constructive relationship with Washington would be tempered at least initially by the need to dispel the inevitable suspicions at home and abroad that the US put it in power. A less likely scenario involves an extremist-dominated government that could become an even greater threat to US interests than the Qadhafi regime. Such extremists would be more willing than Qadhafi to target US personnel and facilities directly in terrorist operations. Although the extremists are opposed to Soviet ideology, they might feel compelled to try to obtain Moscow's protection if they perceived themselves under strong US pressure. In return, Moscow might demand increased access to Libyan air and naval facilities and push Tripoli to adopt policies in support of Soviet objectives in the Middle East and elsewhere.

* * * * *

We judge that Qadhafi's prospects for survival are poorer now than at any time since he came to power 16 years ago.

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This memorandum was prepared by [redacted] the Maghreb Branch, Arab-Israeli Division, Office of Near Eastern and South Asian Analysis, with a contribution from the Near East/North Africa Branch of the Office of Central Reference. Information as of 25 September 1985 was used in its preparation. Questions and comments should be directed to Chief, Arab-Israeli Division, [redacted]

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economic policies, economic constraints imposed by the soft oil market, and wasteful spending in support of radical causes worldwide are seriously eroding the relatively high standard of living that once was regarded by most Libyans as among the principal fruits of Qadhafi's revolution. These developments, in our view, combined with widely resented abuses of power by Qadhafi's extremist supporters, are creating the political climate that encourages plotting by Qadhafi's many opponents and increases their chances of penetrating his elaborate security network. [redacted]

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The Key Players

In our judgment, four key groups have the capability of deposing Qadhafi. These groups include:

--Qadhafi's relatives and fellow tribesmen, assigned to Libya's most important military and security posts, who are concerned that his declining political fortunes threaten their predominant position in Libya. [redacted]

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--Libyan nationalists in the armed forces, who would be motivated by their loss of political influence to the revolutionary committees and their resentment at Qadhafi's establishment of a Peoples Militia as a counterweight. [redacted]

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--Exiled Libyan dissidents, who oppose Qadhafi because his revolution has deprived them of their wealth, status, and political influence in Libya. [redacted]

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--Fanatics in the revolutionary committees, who might depose Qadhafi in opposition to one of his periodic tactical shifts toward moderation or to prevent him from curbing their influence. [redacted]

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Instability Ahead

None of these groups appears to us to have the strength to quickly consolidate its position on its own, even in the event of a pre-emptive move by one of them. The Qadhafa tribe is relatively small and would need to coopt its rivals or to expand

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its base of support to maintain control. There are also indications of personal rivalries over assuming Qadhafi's mantle, which would seriously weaken the Qadhafia's ability to carry the day. Qadhafi's extensive security precautions militate against a coup by nationalist military officers that would immediately eliminate Qadhafi's tribesmen or the revolutionary committees as political actors. Libyan exiles have been unable to build an extensive reliable support network inside the country because of long absence from Libya. The revolutionary committees would likely encounter deep-rooted popular resentment over their role in orchestrating Qadhafi's brutal efforts over the past 10 years to suppress dissent. [redacted]

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In our view, these weaknesses portend instability in the immediate post-Qadhafi period. Available evidence does not indicate anyone of Qadhafi's stature able and in a position to take control. [redacted]

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[redacted] Even some form of collegial rule involving elements from all four factions would only serve as a facade for intense behind the scenes maneuvering. [redacted]

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The radicals and the exiles would be in the worst position to survive such infighting, in our view. Available evidence indicates that the revolutionary committees have insufficient arms, equipment, and training to maintain power by oppression. Even lining up behind their titular chief, Qadhafi's deputy Abd al-Salam Jallud, is unlikely to generate much popular support because his longstanding reputation for corruption and debauchery would make him a political liability. [redacted]

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[redacted] we believe that only a successful attack on Qadhafi would provide the exiles the leverage needed to have a significant role in a post Qadhafi regime. [redacted]

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Implications for the US

The most dangerous outcome from the standpoint of US interests would be the emergence of a regime dominated by revolutionary committee extremists. Such a government probably would be an even greater threat to US interests than Qadhafi. [redacted]

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[redacted] They almost certainly would exploit their positions in the government to support terrorism and subversion as foreign policy instruments. This would heighten the threat of direct Libyan involvement in terrorist operations against US personnel and facilities, particularly in the Middle East. Any US attempt to counter Libyan aggression, however, could push the regime into Soviet hands. This might open up additional opportunities for Moscow to obtain increased access to Libyan air and naval facilities and to promote a Libyan foreign

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policy that uses moderate tactics to undermine US interests. [redacted]

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In our judgment, any other regime--even one dominated by the Qadhafi clan--probably would want a more constructive relationship with Washington. We believe that such a new regime's focus on building popular support would require bringing order to Qadhafi's chaotic system of government, curtailing costly foreign adventures, and redressing popular socio-economic grievances. The need to promote and revise economic priorities would require the new government to improve its international image--particularly by reducing Libyan involvement in revolutionary causes worldwide--to facilitate access to Western consumer goods, technology, and managerial expertise. This almost certainly would involve approaches to the US. [redacted]

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At the same time such a regime probably would proceed cautiously to allay inevitable suspicions at home and abroad that the US "installed" it in power. Qadhafi's vitriolic 16-year attack on Western values and frequent references to the brutal Italian occupation of Libya during the early 1900s, ensures that no new leadership could survive without demonstrating its independence from Western influence. In addition, existing Islamic currents in Libya probably would reinforce the regime's determination to pursue a nonaligned foreign policy, particularly during a time of domestic political turmoil. Any emphasis by the regime on traditional Islamic values would be intended to build support among Libyans who inevitably would look to Islam to provide a sense of personal security in their daily lives. [redacted]

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In our view, the nonaligned and Islamic affinities of the new regime would result in continuing opposition to US-sponsored peace initiatives. Such a regime also probably would remain involved in areas where traditional Libyan political and economic interests are engaged, such as in Tunisia, Niger, Sudan, and Chad. [redacted]

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What Can the Soviets Do?

We doubt that Moscow could install a Marxist-oriented pro-Soviet regime without a greatly expanded Soviet military presence. Soviet advisers are too few and scattered to take control of the Libyan military and swing it into action. Moreover, widespread dissatisfaction in Libyan military circles with the quality of Soviet assistance is accompanied by general cultural alienation and ill-will resulting from a condescending attitude by Soviet advisers toward their Libyan students,

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Moscow's capability to influence a Libyan succession would depend on which groups came to the fore. In any case, judgments about Moscow's influence are perforce speculative given the limited information on Soviet assets and inroads among the various Libyan groupings. Moscow's extensive and longstanding training of Libyan military personnel and their 1,500-2,000 man military advisory contingent in Libya point to greater Soviet influence with nationalist officers and Qadhafia tribesmen in the armed forces and security services than with ideologues or exiles.

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The Soviets at a minimum probably have used their extensive contacts in military circles to identify Libyan officers most likely to assume key political positions in a post-Qadhafi regime. Moscow thereby probably also has acquired potentially valuable information on these officers' views, leadership skills, and lifestyles to use in its efforts to develop a pro-Soviet faction within the armed forces. Such information,

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could help them exploit political uncertainties resulting from Qadhafi's removal. Moscow could use its access to Libyan military personnel and facilities to warn the Libyan regime of a coup if the Soviets deemed a change in government against their interests.

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Moscow's willingness to use whatever assets it has in Libya to influence the succession is another key unknown. The Soviets might adopt a wait-and-see approach, believing their interests would be preserved in any case by continued Libyan dependence on Soviet military assistance. To strengthen Moscow's hold on this dependency, the Soviets initially might offer additional weaponry to the new regime at concessional rates. The payoff of such an approach could be lessened, however, if, as we expect, West European governments--particularly the French--were willing to help reduce Libyan dependence on Moscow by supplying advanced arms.

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On balance, we regard Soviet leverage as insufficient to deter any regime not comprising revolutionary committee fanatics from seeking improved relations with Washington. Instead, the new regime probably would try to play off Moscow and Washington in an attempt to maximize the military and economic benefits it needs to survive in power.

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